

MALICIOUS DESTRUCTION

Vandalism, or malicious destruction of property, includes tire slashing, window-smashing, spray-painting, and myriad other crimes in which someone's property is willfully and maliciously damaged. It is the most commonly reported crime in Cambridge, yet we suspect that vandalism is one of the most underreported crimes; residents and businesses frequently ignore "minor" incidents of vandalism and graffiti.

1016 reported in 2002 • 910 reported in 2003

Incidents of malicious destruction, or "vandalism," decreased by over one hundred incidents in 2003. Many neighborhoods, such as Agassiz and Peabody, experienced significant decrease in incidents compared to their normal totals. These decreases can be attributed to the sharp decline in incidents of graffiti and a significant decrease in damage to cars around the city.

Despite the overall decrease in damage to motor vehicles when compared to last year, 68% of the malicious destruction incidents reported in 2003 still involved such damage. Most of the incidents occurred overnight to cars parked on the street. Often, these incidents are the result of auto thefts or larcenies from motor vehicles that were never carried to conclusion, leaving a window smashed or a door lock popped.

Generally speaking, vandalism most often falls into one of the following categories:

1. Juveniles looking for a thrill, including "taggers" or graffiti artists, sometimes with the intention of "marking their territories" with commonly known symbols
2. Revenge-motivated incidents, including neighbor and/or landlord/tenant disputes, traffic and parking disputes, as well as unsettled domestic situations
3. Botched attempts to steal the car itself or to steal contents within the car (i.e. the window is smashed or the ignition is damaged, but nothing is taken)

VANDALISM BY NEIGHBORHOOD		
Area	2002	2003
East Cambridge	141	111
MIT	10	16
Inman/Harrington	58	65
Area 4	99	105
Cambridgeport	142	142
Mid-Cambridge	119	83
Riverside	86	72
Agassiz	27	12
Peabody	107	78
West Cambridge	60	66
North Cambridge	112	106
Cambridge Highlands	32	31
Strawberry Hill	23	23

VANDALISM BY CATEGORY		
Category	2002	2003
Car window smashed	209	213
Dents/other damage to car	214	165
Tires slashed or punctured	120	117
Scratches, "pinstripes"	77	85
Attempted theft	63	42
Total Damage to Autos	683	622
Misc. damage at residences	75	67
Window of residence smashed	31	39
Total Damage to Residences	106	106
Window of business smashed	53	63
Misc. damage to businesses	46	46
Total Damage to Businesses	99	109
Graffiti	126	71
Miscellaneous damage	2	2

The malicious destruction total is often fueled by spree of incidents committed in one night in a concentrated geographic area by the same suspect(s). Several sprees of incidents were reported in 2003. The following is a review of those incidents:

- During the first weekend in January, nine incidents of malicious destruction were reported in the Cambridgeport neighborhood. Six out of the nine incidents involved the smashing of car windows. The remaining three incidents involved two smashed windows at area businesses and one smashed house window. It is suspected that the same suspect committed each incident with a BB gun.
- On January 7, an unknown suspect smashed six car windows and four business windows in East Cambridge. This suspect also used a BB gun, and the cars targeted were all sport utility vehicles.

- On January 15, an unknown suspect slashed the tires of five vehicles parked on Kelley Street in the Peabody neighborhood.
- On April 13, between 9:50 p.m. and 10:20 p.m., an unknown suspect slashed the tires on four cars parked on Elm Street in the Area 4 neighborhood.
- On a weekend in late May, eleven incidents of tire slashing and two incidents of pinstriping were reported in the Mid-Cambridge neighborhood. All of the vehicles targeted were sport utility vehicles.
- Between July 12-14, eight vehicles parked on Columbia Street in the Area 4 neighborhood had their tires slashed. Makes and models targeted varied.
- On Halloween, four incidents of damage were reported in the Peabody neighborhood in the area of Cadbury Road. Two car windows, one house window, and one business window appeared to have been broken by a BB pellet.

GRAFFITI

Graffiti is a citywide issue that affects public, private, and institutional property owners. Both graffiti prevention and removal are time-consuming, expensive, and require continuous intervention. Perpetrators of graffiti include gang members, bored juveniles, and self-styled “artists” who regard other people’s property as their canvas.

Incidents of graffiti accounted for 8% of the malicious destruction total in 2003. The Area 4, North Cambridge and Cambridgeport neighborhoods often report the highest totals of graffiti. It is important to note, however, that a high percentage of graffiti incidents are not reported to the police.

The City of Cambridge plays a central role in the eradication of graffiti by coordinating prevention and enforcement efforts, acting as a clearinghouse for graffiti identification and removal, and setting an example by providing good maintenance of its own property. Citizens, community groups, businesses, residential property owners, and other public agencies and institutions are strongly encouraged to work together with the city to effectively combat graffiti.

How You Can Help:

- Use the Graffiti Hotline (349-INFO) to report addresses of vandalized sites.
- Organize community clean-up days.
- Remove graffiti promptly from your property.
- Educate your children about the costs and impact of graffiti.

Call the Graffiti Hotline:

- To report locations where graffiti exists. The information will be forwarded to the appropriate agency or property owner for removal and to the Police Department for investigation.
- To provide information to help apprehend “taggers.” Your information will be kept confidential.
- For information on removal supplies and techniques if you have graffiti on your property.
- For resources to help organize community clean-up days.

Other Graffiti Removal Telephone Numbers:

If you witness someone “tagging” property	Call 911
Cambridge Housing Authority property	864-3020
Traffic Department (<i>Traffic Signs, Meters, Signals</i>)	349-4700
Water Department (<i>Fire Hydrants, Fresh Pond Area</i>)	349-4781
Harvard Real Estate Office (<i>Harvard Property</i>)	495-2234
Postal Service (<i>Mail Boxes</i>)	876-0620
MBTA Complaint Line	222-5215
MDC Bridges, Pools, Facilities	727-5114 Ext. 530
MIT Real Estate Office (<i>MIT Property</i>)	253-1483
Middlesex County Courthouse, Registry, Other Facilities	494-4100
Electrical Department (<i>Pay Phones, Fire Boxes</i>)	349-4925
School Department Property	349-6854